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SPRING 2017

FRESH DIGGS

Whether a vintage blacksmithing shop, a spiffy senior living facility or a teeny tiny house, we're looking at what's blossoming in the housing market.

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ON THE COVER

Jewelry designer Stacy Hopkins has converted a centuries-old Hartland barn and blacksmith shop into her studio and residence.



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Once Upon a Barn

An Upper Valley jeweler revives a historic blacksmith shop

BY RACHEL ELIZABETH JONES

In January 2016, Stacy Hopkins entered into her own personal fairy tale. The jewelry designer — owner of White River Junction's Seavenger Gallery — and her boyfriend, carpenter Mark Meyerross, closed on a historic Hartland half-acre property. It includes a centuries-old barn and a blacksmith shop dating back to the 1750s. Though Hopkins has transformed the stone-walled workshop into her jewelry studio, the space retains what she called a “storybook,” “out-of-time” feel.

Top: Stacy Hopkins in her jewelry studio, formerly a blacksmith shop.

Bottom: The 18th-century blacksmith shop, which Hopkins and Meyerross converted into a jewelry studio.

Opposite page: Hopkins and Meyerross's renovated historic barn used to store cowbells and is now a light fixture.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMES





The blacksmith shop was built in "that era when things were really done to last," Hopkins said — and, indeed, it maintains many of its original features. Albert somewhat crouching, the stone forge occupies the north side of a small building, directly across the room is the outline of a barn door, which opened up for horses that needed reshoeing. It has since been replaced by an ordinary door, upon which Hopkins has tacked turkey feathers.

Just below a window-facing window are wooden fixtures from the original work bench, hooks for hanging tools that are smooth with wear. Nearby are some of Hopkins' finished cast-iron pieces: a cowl with graying crab claws, a pair of shell earrings, tiny acorn earrings.

"I'm really nostalgic for when people put thought and care into things," Hopkins said during North's recent visit to the shop. She was wearing one of her own pieces, a bronze casting made from a cat skull in the collection of La Specola, Europe's oldest natural history museum and public Wunderkammer ("cabinet of

curiosities"). From majoring in biology to studying jewelry making in Florence, Italy, Hopkins has built her career on delineating the natural world with the very human process of making.

Jewelry could easily seem out of place in a historic space made for heavy work, but Hopkins' collections have a variation on the theme of timelessness. Just like the building, her pieces are built to last. "There's no reason to have this disposable culture," she commented.

Hopkins tells her line, along with fine wines and works by other local artists, at the Hotel Goodridge-adjacent Scoville Gallery, which she founded in 2008. Beyond Vermont, she has found particular success in European markets and has been featured in Vogue Gioielli (Jewelry), Vogue, Elle Italia and Annamagid, among others.

The studio, though lovely already, is still a work in progress, Hopkins noted. Currently, she and Mayrose are considering knocking out its small second

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Once Upon a Barn

face in order to raise the ceiling. When they bought the place, an awkwardly positioned built-in bookshelf created an obstacle — so they replaced it with a wooden swing. They're thinking about turning the space out through Airbnb in the future.

Hopkins officially celebrated her studio's grand opening last August by hosting an evening party. Since then, she has continued to invite the public to intimate open-studio events, she believes that the history of the building "keeps us in the community conscious," she said. "People from the community need to see it."

To that end, it doesn't hurt that local favorite watering hole Skunk Hollow Tavern — also built in the 18th century — is directly across the street. "The only place I'd want to live in Hartford is across from the Skunk," said Hopkins with a laugh.

She and Meyerson reside in the converted barn, located between the studio and Ludl Brook. Standing on the studio's steeple was paraded porch, one can admire the house's high arched windows, which were salvaged from

a nearby church and installed on the second floor.

Inside, the house is open and airy, with exposed beams and plenty of natural sunlight. The couple redid the floors and installed a concrete kitchen counter. A large metal chandelier affixed to the ceiling light makes for an idiosyncratic touch. Hopkins pointed out her favorite wooden pegs as well as the non-rounding porch stools, clearly reflecting these details of authenticity.

She continues to adhere and dream about uses for her newfound home and workspace. An oenophile, Hopkins foresees wine dinners and is also considering inviting artists to show work in the studio. "I want a place where I can finally use all of my ideas," she said. It would seem that her dream is coming true.

INFO

Learn more at darcy-hopkins-design.com.

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Robb Meyerson and Darcy Hopkins at the Lindbergh Shop



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PHOTO BY JEFFREY M. HARRIS

Farm Futures

A Huntington couple plan to turn their land into a cohousing community

BY KEN PICARD

Marjike and Mark Smith first met in the Peace Corps a half century ago, each trying to make the world a better place. So it's only fitting that, as they enter their twilight years, they're working to leave behind a cohousing community that perpetuates those values after they're gone.

The Smiths are co-owners of Windland Farm, a 125-acre property on a south-facing slope of Camel's Hump in Huntington. This scenic yet picturesque landscape, which they named after a character in a Dutch fairy tale—Mergle, who was born in the Netherlands—includes mountain meadows, woodlands, ponds, streams, gardens and pastures. Currently, the Smiths operate a wedding and vacation cottage business on the land. There's even a one-fifth-acre model schoolhouse the Mark built, which visitors can ride through the woods in warm weather.

But the Smiths' latest project is their boldest yet. Their goal is to create what they've dubbed the Commons at Windland, a cohousing community of nine privately owned, single-family homes that share common resources and the values of community, collaborative decision making, energy efficiency and sustainable living. Launched three years ago, the project is halfway through the permitting process; construction of the first homes is expected to begin this summer.

The Commons at Windland is the latest "intentional community" to pop up in Vermont, one of 22 such communities statewide, according to the Fellowship for Intentional Community, an international nonprofit. While a

few are religiously oriented, most are secular and based upon a philosophy of sustainability and resiliency in the age of global warming. Ted Montgomery, founder of the Two Acres cohousing community in Charlotte, once described his community as "a rebellion with a soul."

Although cohousing communities may seem like relatively new additions to the landscape, Mark points out that they actually hark back to Vermont's traditional land development patterns.

"The basic premise is, a shared economy is a stronger economy," he explains. "It all goes back to the basic principles of what Vermont is all about—our town meeting tradition, our village greens, our common schools. It's a no-nonsense concept."

Marjike, who retains her Dutch accent, recalls how she and Mark met as houseback in northeast Brazil in 1963. Mark was serving in the American Peace Corps, she in the Dutch equivalent. When Mark's two-year stint was nearly over, the two realized they'd never be able to stay in touch, so Mark asked Marjike to marry him.

The couple left Brazil to "wonder the world together," he says, first in the United States, then to Holland to marry, then back to the U.S. and on to British Columbia. During a stint at Orford



Marjike and Mark Smith

Island in Colorado, they learned about a farm for sale in rural Vermont. So, in 1965, the couple bought the Huntington property, a defunct dairy farm, for \$30,000.

For many years, Marjike worked as a counselor in local public schools while Mark taught developmental psychology at the University of Vermont. By 2000, the Smiths were facing retirement and the challenge of how to preserve their land despite its enormous tax burden. Recall Mark, "We just did not have the financial wherewithal to take that on."

To make ends meet, the pair launched their current lodging business, offering three rustic post-and-beam cottages to vacationers. They then expanded into the wedding business because of the location's gorgeous panoramic views.

But about three years ago, the Smiths, now in their seventies, realized they wouldn't be able to adequately sustain the housekeeping and routine maintenance by themselves. So they began work on a succession plan.

Initially, Mark says, they assumed one of their three grown children would take over the business. But because the "laid" families and employment are diverse and mostly based elsewhere, he and Marjike began exploring other options.



After making a conventional development — that is, a standard subdivision that involves selling off parcels of the land piecemeal — Mark says he became keenly interested in the literature on cohousing and permaculture.

"That whole body of knowledge spoke to a much more integrated and community-based mechanism to sustain the land," he says.

"It's really a design approach that does a lot of things for the landscape and the people that traditional development patterns don't do."

Diving into the process wasn't difficult for Mark, who served for years on various municipal bodies, including Huntington's Development Review Board, selectboard, school board and planning commission, the last of which he chaired twice. Such involvement gave him the expertise to navigate the various bureaucratic hoops necessary to bring the project to fruition.

Due to its topography, the Commons will be considerably less dense than many traditional cohousing developments.

"We mix the idea of a home and not crowding people together," Marjolei says. That's resulted in some "pushback" from Vermont's cohousing community, which prefers denser development. But the Smiths hope to retain the "rural village" concept that makes this spot so enticing.

They have also invested considerable time into creating a mission statement, bylaws, design standards and the like — for example, they've nipped out common land for use as future gardens, orchards, pastures, even a community

center. That said, much of what the community will ultimately look like will be up to its future residents.

They'll include Steve Hood, 66, one of the Commons' first investors. He and his wife had been looking for a home or property to build on in Huntington for the last five years when they chanced upon the Smiths.

"Initially we had no concept or intention of joining a structured cohousing community," Hood admits. "But this appeals to us on a

basal level."

Hood, who's already had a hand in shaping the orientation of his lot and the design standards, says he's surprised these lots haven't sold out already.

"We were looking for real value," he adds — both in community and real estate. "If you read the bylaws and mission statement, you can really see the values that Mark and Marjolei bring to this project."

For his part, Mark expects interest will grow once more potential investors learn about their plans.

"The land's long gone and done a lot of things, but nothing has captured my imagination like this project," he says, as he surveys the land from a vantage point high above the valley. "It gets to the heart of my values about community and preserving open space for future generations."

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Small Is Beautiful

Norwich University's "alternative to the trailer" wins awards and fans

BY AMY LILLY

Mary, a 37-year-old Shelburne resident, had always imagined herself living in a small cabin. She started saving in high school, and, by 2015, she'd banked \$30,000 to buy one. But Mary's work — as a home caregiver — made her wary of taking on a mortgage. She was determined to find a house that cost no more than \$30,000.

Impossible, right? Yet, in early 2016, Mary got a call about a tiny house being designed at Norwich University in Northfield, home to Vermont's only nationally accredited architecture program. Professor Tolly Skosnowski and her yearlong design-build class were building an energy-efficient, 236-square-foot home they called CASA 802 (for Creating Affordable Sustainable Architecture). They would need a buyer at the end of the semester. Given the fire, donated materials and a hefty grant, the \$60,000 house could be sold for \$30,000.

Mary purchased the house and, in November, had it moved to its current location. (For privacy, she asked Nest not to reveal her real name or address.) The expenses of transportation, crane,

foundation, crew space and utilities looked set her back at other \$30,000.

Though CASA 802 is small compared with the park's 20 mobile homes and four VerModos — Vermont-made modular homes — its minimalist industrial look makes it stand out. In December, it won the People's Choice Award from the Vermont chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

CASA 802 is a one-off. By this May, however, home hunters on extreme budgets like Mary's will have a similar — if even smaller — option to consider. A second iteration of the Norwich tiny house, designed and built by Skosnowski's colleague Matt Lutz and his students and called SoCASA (for Single-Dweller CASA), will be complete by the end of

the current semester. And this one is going to cost less than \$30,000.

That's a remarkable sticker price, considering that the 268-square-foot SoCASA will be built with nearly all locally sourced, saved and produced materials. Fastlane Millwork & Forestry, a family-run sawmill in East Montpelier, will provide many of those. Mill owner Marc Fontaine and Montpelier inventor Don Rowan have a memorandum of understanding with the university to buy the prototype on completion. Fontaine says he will begin turning out the prefab homes on demand in June.

The price is also notable because a single-wide mobile home averages \$40,000. Included as an alternative to mobile homes, SoCASA will be the second Vermont-produced home in that category

to appear on the market. The first was the VerModo, launched in 2013, a completely solar-powered modular home that's produced in a factory in Wilder.

Mobile homes may be affordable, but they're typically built from off-gassing materials, lack energy-efficiency and need not be built to code. Because their eventual destiny is a landfill, banks won't finance their purchase at the same generous rates they will a stick-built home. When Mary visited a newly built mobile home during her search for affordable housing, she had trouble breathing. "I couldn't even go in there, the smell was so bad," she recalled.

To compare the two alternatives, on a recent sunny winter day, Nest toured both CASA 802 and a nearby VerModo. (SoCASA hasn't yet moved beyond the model stage.) Skosnowski helped Mary show her home. The VerModo's owner, whom we'll call Jane, showed her house with Phoebe Howe, a homeownership adviser who manages the mobile-home replacement program at Efficiency Vermont.

Jane's VerModo is a long, luxurious-looking 268-square-foot box similar in



©Tolly Skosnowski



BY LARRY FORD

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LARRY FORD

SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL. BY TOLLY SKOSNOWSKI

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plan to a mobile home but with a bed and bath on each end. Window wells are 30 inches deep because of insulation. June opened the utility closet to reveal an "energy recovery" ventilator system, which both filters air and uses exhaust air for heating. The rooftop solar panels power everything in the house.

All that solid construction, however, has a cost: VeriMod averages \$156,000—or \$166,000, if the buyer qualifies for available tax breaks and incentives. Mitigating the sticker price is the company's claim that monthly payments on a VeriMod are lower than those on a conventional mobile home, given the latter's high price and utilities costs. Of course, payments on a VeriMod last year longer.

June, a writer who formerly taught English in the Boston area, was able to afford her VeriMod in part because of an inheritance from her grandparents. But Mary, who turned a "beastie" VeriMod during her search, had to tell the two men showing it—Steve Davis, VeriMod's director, and Peter Schneider of Vermont Energy Investment Corporation—that she would stick to her budget. Schneider kept Mary in

mind, when the Norwich project came up a year and a half later, he put her in touch with the university.

Norwich's architecture program has a long-standing interest in housing Vermont's low-income sector in energy-efficient structures. Later, Stancore and other professors have led two affordable solar-powered house design-bid-build for the Solar Decathlon. The second was 12th place in 2013 and now sits, for educational purposes, on a restored Frank Lloyd Wright property in Springfield, Ohio.

Late said he learned much from those experiences—chiefly the benefits of a super-tight building envelope. But the cost of the 20x30 house, at \$164,000, drove him and Stancore to look for less expensive options. For one thing, he said, many Vermonters could not afford a built-in solar array.

Mary's CASA can take solar panels off and when she wants to invest in them. Meanwhile, the building's particularly

tight envelope and electric heat pump keep energy consumption low.

The tiny house is a rectangular, gabled box with a metal standing-seam roof that continues without eaves down the long sides of the structure to form its cladding. The ends of the box are lined with charred cedar boards, their

blackened finish contrasting with the aluminum-colored siding and a red front door. One end extends over a four-foot-deep deck.

Inside, birch plywood built-ins accent the three rooms: a living-dining-living area, a bathroom, and a bedroom that somehow fits a queen-size bed and a huge closet. The 30-foot ceilings, multiple windows and sliding glass door to the deck make the 214-square-foot space airy.

In the few months since she moved in, Mary has filled the space with "ecoholistic" and warm decorative touches, such as the inspirational sayings whose letters she cut from

magazines and posted to the walls. "When you finally buy a house, you're so excited you want to get stuff" she explained. She's had to make a few changes to the students' design decisions, including the kitchen seating, to accommodate her very tall boyfriend.

VeriMod will be even sparer. The single-room-cum-living design is "painfully simple," said Late. It will need only two small electric heaters instead of an expensive heat pump. Framing will be done with metal corner-bracing, eliminating the need for plywood, which is not made in Vermont. A sense of interior spaciousness will be preserved with a Murphy bed and a single burner for cooking that can be put away to make counter space.

"The big picture on these is to make an available, turnkey, affordable, high-performance tiny house," Late said. "For so many people, it's about that up-front cost."

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INFO

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Going With the Grain

With new ownership, Sam's Wood Furniture rebuilds itself

BY SABIE WILLIAMS



On Monday, Sarah Coates sends furniture orders to her builders from her office — or her yoga mat — in her Connecticut home. On Wednesday or Thursday, she makes the drive to Burlington. There the 37-year-old stays through Sunday to take care of her business, Sam's Wood Furniture.

The seventh-generation Vermonter was living in Colchester when she and her husband, Peter Govershown, bought Sam's in 2003. Then called Sam's Unfinished Furniture, the store had been around since 1960. The Old North End storefront was crowded with bare-wood tables, chairs, beds and so on, waiting for new owners to step on paint or varnish and welcome them home.

Since Coates' takeover, a lot has changed. She moved to Connecticut with her husband and two kids a

year and a half after buying the shop, because Govershown received a job offer they couldn't resist. But that didn't stop Coates from flipping the furniture business on its head.

Today, Sam's sells mostly custom-finished items. Supplied with a new website, it's expanding online sales outside Vermont. Coates has bulked up her roster of Amish builders in Indiana, Ohio and Pennsylvania — who do most of the finishing work — and started a service installing custom wall units



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Then, she estimates,
make up 30 percent
of the business.

Through all this,
Costes has kept the
store's location — on
the triangle of
land where North
Willard Street



and North Willard Avenue meet
Riverside Avenue. But the store has a
whole new look and feel. When she
first toured Scott's, Costes says, it had
a major warehouse vibe. "There were
three nightstands stacked on top of
each other," she recalls. Now it presents
furniture in the country-chic vein it
represents that inside the shopfront.

The smell of fresh wood permeates
the air. Colorful cushions cover the
bed. Plaster and soap bowls top a
salmon-painted kitchen island, and a
woven basket hangs off the edge of a
wooden bench.

Costes attributes these arrange-
ments to her manager, Maria Merrill,
who came from a job at Templo Home
Furnishings. Costes herself has no
background in sales or marketing — but
she does in economics. She met her
husband while running the operations
department at Massachusetts-based
Monte Financiel in 2003. Costes herself
was a partner at the firm.

In 2011, the couple moved to
Vermont and started a satellite office for
Monte in Burlington. The move
didn't work out as planned, Costes
recalls. So they resigned and bought
Scott's a year later.

"We weren't looking for this
[specific business]," she says of the
purchase. "It was just available."

Initially, the real estate was what
attracted her. "I've always wanted to be
a real estate investor," Costes says.
"The opportunity to own commercial
property in a growing section of
Burlington was extremely exciting to
both Peter and me."

And once she walked into the store,
she fell in love — with the product.

"There's a lot of transparency in all
the pieces we sell," Costes says. "It was
a product I could get behind."

Of course, faith that something
will sell isn't enough to make others
buy it. When Costes bought the store,
she says, business was "down." So she
switched gears.

"The models that I worked for people
in the past do not work for people

today," she declares.
"You have to have an
online presence; you
have to have prices
on your website." Not to mention,
Costes adds, "People
know what they
want, and they want

someone to do it for them."

Meaning that, these days, people
don't necessarily want to buy a piece of
furniture and have to paint or finish it
themselves.

Hence Costes' decision to switch
from primarily unfinished to finished
furniture and to up the presence of
Antique-built furniture in the store,
which now accounts for about 80
percent of the inventory. "I like work-
ing with [the Antique builders]," she says,
because "they stand 100 percent behind
their product."

Costes cites the quality of the
craftsmanship and fair price points for
both unfinished and finished products
as major motivators for rejecting Antik
builders.

"I talk to the builders," she says. "I
know them — I've visited their homes.
These are real people, and I'm proud to
sell [for them]."

As for her customer base, Costes
says that's shifting, too. "We're really
tapping into a new demographic," she
notes. When she bought Scott's, most of
the customers were older. Now, Costes
says, "We're seeing 25- to 30-year-olds,
more affluent [people] and first-time
home buyers."

That makes sense, given the pricing.
Each range from \$274 to \$1,099, while
coffee tables cost \$309 to \$794.

Costes spends much of her time in
Vermont visiting clients' houses and
taking measurements for Scott's custom
wall systems, which are built off-site
and then reassembled in the home.

The current model seems to be
working, but this entrepreneur isn't
getting comfortable. "I have a mentor
who owns a store in Chicago," Costes
reveals, "and he says, 'Whenever you
think you've got it figured out, ship
yourself.' You always have to be ready
to adjust." ♥

Contact author at vermont@nestmag.com

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What's the Story?

How to sleuth your home's past lives

BY GINA TRON

If you own, or are thinking of buying, an older home in Vermont, you may be curious about its history. But if your real estate agent or previous owners can't tell you, who you gonna call? Sometimes, you needn't look further than your local historical society.

In January, for example, the Norwich Historical Society held a workshop on just that subject as part of its ongoing series "Your History, Your Story." Director Sarah Rooker and board member Allen Rosenblatner explained how they researched their homes and pointed out that the same steps should work for anyone else in Vermont and New Hampshire.

What's more, learning and sharing the history of your home can be a great way to make new friends.

Rooker compiled a scrapbook for her family about the history of their home and filled it with photographs of deeds, maps, and a photographs of real signs and houses. She put all of the information in her book in chronological order, adding a line sentence for each item to tell the story of her property and neighborhood.

When she took the book to a Christmas party, Rooker said, "It started to build this whole neighborhood connection." She bonded with one neighbor over the fact that the pair homeowners used to bring sheep over a hill and onto Rooker's property. "We really started to talk to each other," she said.

And when she goes for walks on local roads, she knows their outcomes. "Our neighborhood became much more than just houses next to each other," Rooker continued. "History can help build those really strong connections that we all need so badly right now."

Rosenblatner created a similar scrapbook about his home. He and Rooker offered the following options for researching your home.

Deeds

Start by asking the deed for your house. If you don't have a copy, go to your town's office. It has an index file of deeds with both historic or property address. Rooker said the looking up her own home and then started looking online to find previous owners of her home. First the deed in the last deed found a book volume number and page number. These numbers are for the holder, last records book, also existing at the town office. When's the best way to find your deed?

Historic Land Record Books



Record books also have a lot of information. They are the best way to find the corresponding volume number and page number for your deed or map. You will see a

known town, and that should lead to the kind of ownership at the property. Ask about the following: the record book, grantor name (person selling land), grantee name (person buying land), duration of land and building, and any dates. Look at the records for each transaction of your home. Taking detailed notes will pay off, Rooker advised.

Historical Society Records

An record about your town's historical society website is the single best way to property that contains general information, photographs and the names of its occupants. Through the years, in the Rosenblatner found photographs of a family that used to live in his house. It included a husband and wife, their children, their house, and a few more—something that the Rosenblatners also often visited and can be helpful with further research. Going to your local historical society could yield more colorful information and photographs than your town office.

Beers Atlases

Beers Atlases, introduced in 1833, have been maps of every village and town in Vermont. Some include the last names of homeowners along the roads. According to Rosenblatner and Rooker, the Beers Atlas for your county is an excellent resource. Beers Atlas also owned your home, and your neighbors' homes, in the late 18th century (if your house is that old). The atlases bound into volumes by county are available online at www.beersatlases.com for \$30. If you have a high-resolution scan of your home, I think you can find them. Usually you can scan Beers Atlases for free without a library card.



Agricultural and Industrial Census

The U.S. Census Bureau collected detailed agricultural and industrial data every 10 years from 1850 through 1950. According to Rooker and Rosenblatner, these can be another valuable resource for homeowners. You can learn, for example, what industries and occupations were most popular in your area during those years.

The records for both census and how to find them are available at www.census.gov. Library is an option, too. For now, it's best, that's the only way to view the data. It takes a few days for the library to pull the microfilm and get it to the library so that about a week in advance, suggested Rooker.

It's also possible to find information on the 1850 census. In Rosenblatner's case, he learned that in 1850 his home was a 100-acre farm with three houses, seven miles of cows, two oaks, eight half-acre oaks, 10 sheep and three pigs. The census also recorded harvesting material, such as how many bushels of wheat, corn and so on were harvested. And many journals of people kept and on. If your home or property was ever in the census, this census data will allow you to go back over the past 150 years.

Other

Look up the names you put on during your research on the census to other genealogy websites. Rosenblatner and Rooker said: "You can also search names in newspaper archives. Older papers may be available in your town library and the Library of Congress, Rooker noted. Recently began digitizing Vermont newspapers for its Vermont American project. Look it up in chronological order, he gradually said. Being good at Google. In the internet, you might learn a lot of things about previous residents of your home — for the historical record, of course."



Instead, Rosenblatner put the town name into the database at www.vermontbeers.com and learned that he had existed in 1850 and was in the first Vermont Census. He bought a bottle that year and, a few months later was captured and made a prisoner of war.

database showed that the top deed was for the 1850 census. Rosenblatner said: "There's a lot of history in every house."

Senior Living — in Style

Energy-efficient apartment building opens in Milton

BY MOLLY WALSH



Above: Sally Momoney and Brenda Bean in the community room and the kitchen in a one-bedroom apartment.

Sally Momoney chatted amiably with Brenda Bean in the light-soaked community room of Elm Place, a new apartment building for seniors in the center of Milton. The two women had just met for the first time during a residents' orientation a few weeks before the building officially opened for move-ins on March 3. The ladies admired the palette of fresh gray, blue and sage-colored paint on the walls and the tall bay of tilt-and-turn windows overlooking the back garden where residents can plant herbs and flowers in the spring.

The local art was their approval, too: a wall painted with an old map of Milton and another decorated with a caramel-colored slab of a mosaic, 1960s tiles filled by Dutch elm disease. And they liked the way, 13-foot ceilings in the community room and the modern, barrel-shaped light fixtures. The space is more urban loft than institutional senior housing.

As much as Momoney and Bean appreciated the details in the sleek-blue building on Hawthorne Road, they were just as happy about the prospect of something more intangible: new friendships. Both women said they craved a more social lifestyle when they agreed up to live at Elm Place. It will offer on-site tea and chess classes and chair yoga, and its location in the designated downtown

of Milton affords pedestrian access to the library, town office, churches, grocery store and a doctor's office.

Momoney, age 70, has been living by herself in a Milton apartment with no supports or programming, and no garage for her vehicle, a truck will now be in a covered parking area. She's ready to get to know her new neighbors. "That's one of the drawing factors for me," said Momoney, a retired Milton schools employee. "I am single, I don't have family up here and I do tend to isolate — and they say it's not good for you."

She'll move in on April 1. "I can't wait," Momoney said.

Bean, 66, is a former Milton resident who now lives with her son in Burlington. The retired office worker has diabetes and, like other

residents, will be able to access various supports at Elm Place. A part-time wellness nurse and a full-time health care coordinator who can help residents line up appointments and access care hours. There is space for an apartment of her own. "I just needed my own thing, my own space," she said.

The ultra-energy-efficient building is owned and managed by nonprofit Cathedral Square in Burlington, whose portfolio includes about 500 units of rental housing around the region. After a local survey showed strong need

for senior housing in growing Milton (pop. 14,822), Cathedral Square assembled two credits, state funding and private donations to build Elm Place, its first property in Milton.

The building has 30 one-bedroom apartments, 28 of which are designated affordable housing (most rent for \$140 a month, including utilities and laundry). To qualify for these units, residents must earn less than 60 percent of area median income—about \$35,000 annually for one person.

Elm Place is an independent living facility, but with supports designed to help seniors "age in place" and avoid social isolation that sometimes comes with age, when people lose mates or become less mobile. "If we can help people stay connected, it can help their overall well-being," said Cindy Reid, director of development at Cathedral Square.

The property is one of the few, if not the only, multi-family "passive" buildings in Vermont, according to its architect, Michael Wronowski of the Burlington firm Dunsmuir Wronowski Architecture. He expects the three-story, 45.4 million building to be certified by the Passive House Institute this spring.

Elm Place is built to use 95 percent less heating energy than a similar-size, standard-construction building. Projections estimate that the 29,000-sq-foot Elm Place will cost about as much to heat as a single-family home. All the lights are LED, and a 20-kilowatt solar-panel system on the roof helps generate power.

The roof and foundation are heavily insulated, as are the walls, which are about four inches thicker than typical construction.

The tight building envelope means residents can air by the single-pane windows on the coldest

Vermont winter days and not feel a draft, said Wronowski.

It also means the structure needs little energy to heat or cool. There are no boilers and no mechanical heat. A cold climate air source heat-pump system keeps the building warm. It runs on electricity

but generates far more energy than it consumes. A small natural gas furnace will provide backup on extremely cold days.

Wronowski shared a joke about passive house construction that says, "Your house is so efficient that you can heat it with your hair dryer." It's kind of true," he said.

Passive construction generally costs it to 10 percent more than typical construction, but economies of scale on the multifamily Elm Place brought the additional expense down lower than that. Then there are possible paybacks: The energy-efficient building design should result in utility savings of about \$11,600 a year.

Elm Place also brings momentum to Milton's bid to create a cultural town center, with the potential to live, work, shop and recreate on foot. It's a short walk from the main drag, Route 7. The neighborhood is a hotbed of suburban architecture now, but Elm Place is built with a more urban look, pulled up to the sidewalk and street, with parking set out of the way to the side and rear rather than in front. It could take some time for the area to fill in with downtown-style development, Wronowski said, but Elm Place is a good start.

"It's nice to be able to help set the tone," he said. 🍷

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Avian Attraction

How to bring birds to your yard

BY GINA TRON

Want to fill your backyard with flutters and sweet melodies? You don't have to be an ornithologist to do so. Even better news: Birds like a yard that's a little messy. So attracting them is easier than you might think. Whether you're moving into a new home this spring or just trying to up your current yard's avian appeal, we've gathered some tips to ensure that your feathered friends flock there.

The No. 1 rule: Don't put up feeders in the spring, particularly if your house is in a rural location or near woods. Feeders can lure in bears along with birds. But there are plenty of other ways to invite winged creatures (butterflies, too) once the snow melts.

Cheryl Dorneside, executive director at the North Branch Nature Center in Montpelier, advises that you first get to know your area's "market." What species tend to populate your area? What kind of habitat do they need? What birds arrive in the spring and summer? Which ones stay all winter long?

A basic bird book or online search might be all you need to figure this out. Don't hesitate to ask your neighbors, too, or create a post about it on Facebook or NextDoor — you might get a new bird-watching buddy out of it.

Apartment dweller? Even if you have just a deck or porch to work with, you could still attract, say, ruby-throated hummingbirds. Look up the plants they like and put some. Perhaps you have a place to hang a sugar-water hummingbird feeder — they're small! Just make sure it can't reach it, too.

If you have a backyard and can make more permanent changes, Dorneside says to remember three crucial things: Birds need food sources, coverage from predators and places to nest.

Go native

Using local natives works with birds. Native, or indigenous, plants "will benefit not just the birds but the whole ecosystem," says Dorneside. Plants that attract the local insect population will attract birds that like to eat them. For example, a viburnum is an insect magnet. Many viburnums produce fruit for birds in the winter. Come spring, caterpillars like to munch these leaves. Those caterpillars are a food source for song sparrows and juncos, warblers.

"Native does the work for us sometimes," Dorneside notes. "We can do plantings, but what will grow naturally in its own is often what is best for the birds."

Create maximum coverage

Consider not just the type of plants in your yard but their placement. Dorneside says that, 20 years ago, the North Branch Nature Center gave a lot area that was shrubs spaced widely apart. Each topped through sometimes but didn't stay long. However, in the 1990s, she and a friend, a group of birds, yellow warblers and song sparrows, all began nesting in the dense shrubbery. "Tons of denser vegetation might attract more species than isolated shrubs cutting the landscape," Dorneside says.

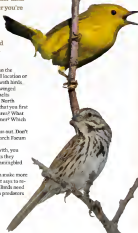
Also lower the undergrowth. That's the layer of vegetation beneath the main canopy of a wooded area. An understory of vines, smaller trees and shrubs will make overbirds, horned larks and warbler species happy.

Dorneside also advises leaving dead trees where they are, unless in your yard, post a danger to nearby children. Woodpeckers, chickadees and nuthatches will build nests in a dead tree and nest in them. "Dead trees are sometimes ugly, but those wings are important for nesting wildlife," he says. "We tend to like things neat and measured, but birds don't care about that, they follow the edges and let things grow a little wild here and there." So consider that a solid excuse to not top up your yard too much.

Finally, if your yard has only trees and shrubs that lose their leaves in the winter, plant some evergreens and consider providing birds with a few predator-free trees and shrubs and perches.

Expand the housing market

If your yard's housing doesn't offer enough nesting areas, you can add some. Sometimes a great bird-watching spot is a safe place to land and raise their young. Birds support chickadees, house wrens, cardinal wrens and bluebirds are among the species that will nest in boxes. Do a yard tour, gathering where, or a neighborhood, to find birdhouses for specific species. Make sure the entrance hole is the right size.



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